

HR Weekly Podcast

12/20/07

Today is December 19, 2007, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources. This week's topic concerns internet use in the workplace.

According to a study published in this month's Society of Human Resource Management magazine, 30 to 40 percent of internet usage by employees in the workplace is not work related. Another study found that the average employee uses company computers 75 minutes per day for non-work activity. Assuming the average employee earns \$20 per hour, that would translate to about \$6,250 in lost productivity annually.

State agencies should have a workplace policy concerning employees' use of the internet. But at a minimum, employers should consider prohibiting the playing of online games, visiting chat rooms, and viewing of pornographic material while at work. Nevertheless, general internet browsing can potentially be just as non-productive, if done in excess. Significant numbers of employees admit to banking, making travel plans, job-hunting, and shopping while at work. Employers should inform employees that in the event of misconduct concerning the web while at work, the employer will follow through with disciplinary action. Employers should also recognize signs of internet abuse and offer resources, such as an Employee Assistance Program, to employees who may have a problem with internet usage. Signs that someone may be surfing the internet in excess while at work may include hiding internet usage, missing deadlines, losing interest in hobbies, preferring to be online, and lacking interpersonal skills.

To help address some of these issues, almost three-quarters of Chief Information Officers surveyed in a national poll indicated that they have installed firewalls to block websites that are not related to work. Others said they may monitor web history and e-mail messages. Under federal law, these actions are permissible as long as certain precautionary steps are taken, such as including the necessary language in internet or email usage policies. Many employers inform their employees that internet use at work should pertain to the job, and non-work related websites should not be visited in excess. Too much web surfing at work can lead to technology problems, such as virus attacks and the installation of spyware.

If you have any questions about this issue, please call your HR Consultant at 737-0900.

Thank you